



THE HIDDEN WANDERINGS OF DURRUTI



PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS &
DISCUSSIONS
FOR LAND & FREEDOM

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE
'ANARCHIVE'
"Anarchy is Order!"

*'I must Create a System or be enslav'd by
another Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business
is to Create'
(William Blake)*

During the 19th century, anarchism has developed as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, disappear little by little under the dust of history.

After the classical anarchism – of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives—a 'new' kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as 'Anarchy is order', 'Property is theft',...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disappearing. The 'anarchive' or 'anarchist archive' Anarchy is Order (in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the '**principles, propositions and discussions**' of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don't belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists and other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new impulse, to let the 'new

anarchism' outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

'Anarchy Is Order' does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives.

Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing texts from the CD (collecting all available texts at a given moment) that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts to friends and new ones to us,... Become your own anarchiv!!!

(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and authors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchiv offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

*“...demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters down
here;
and the dirty microbes that send us dark diseases and
wish to
squash us like horseflies;
and the will-‘o-the-wisp of the saddest ignorance.”
(L-P. Boon)*

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us.
Don't mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism, cooperation can be sent
to A.O@advalvas.be.

A complete list and updates are available on this
address, new texts are always

welcome!!

THE HIDDEN WANDERINGS OF DURRUTI

A violent rapping on Félix López's door. It was six in the morning. Could it be the police? No. They were the knockings of Pedro Nolasco Arratia, companion in misadventure of the clandestine group Light and Action, and an anarcho-syndicalist leader, like Félix. He came in secret; rapidly he must get to Matta Avenue, to the headquarters of the IWW, the organization of the Anarchist Workers of the World. He should ask no questions, Arratia said, it was an affair about which no-one should know anything. It was the month of July, it was the depths of Winter, in Santiago de Chile. The year was 1925.

There were no more than 5 people in the IWW offices. They all had quirky, strong Spanish accents. Only two spoke. One was big-bodied, extrovert, friendly, passionate, with an open gaze and a lot of charisma. The other was short, thin, very serious and very nervous. López recalls: "a tiny fella, but one who exuded courage". The first was Buenaventura Durruti, the other, Francisco Ascaso. The rest were: Ascaso's brother, Alejandro; Gregorio Jover and Antonio Rodríguez, El Toto. It was he who, after the Chilean hold-ups, would return to France, taking with him 47,000 pesos for the struggle against the dictatorship in Spain.

All were members of the Anarchist Group, the Solidarios, throughout their travels known as The Wanderers, about whom López and Arratia had heard almost unbelievable stories regarding their infamous attack on the bank of Spain in Gijón in 1923, as well as other actions of a similarly incredible nature.

Condemned to Death

López could tell that Durruti and Ascaso were more than just friends, they were inseparable brothers who understood one another by just a simple glance. Durruti had broken Ascaso out of Saragossa Prison just a short time before Ascaso --already sentenced to death-- was expected to be riddled by the bullets of a firing-squad. Also, they had shared the life of exile in Belgium and France, while together planning, and carrying out, a series of high level guerilla attacks. Between 1923 and 1930, the Primo de Rivera dictatorship years, they were a constant headache for the régime, as was the powerful anarcho-syndicalist CNT (Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores)--with its 250,000 members) to which they belonged.

Without López knowing anything about it till then --the Wanderers stop-off in Chile was an unforeseen one-- they had come to visit during their trip through South America "gathering funds" to finance the CNT, the guerillas and the most radical section of the Spanish Workers' Movement. These had been decimated and brutally repressed by Primo de Rivera. According to Hugh Thomas, some 40,000 CNT members, at this time, filled Spanish jails. Whatever, Durruti and his pals still had the good-breeding to distribute part of their hard-earned takings to all the anarchist unions in all the countries they visited.

"Six masked men raided the Matadero Branch of the Bank of Chile and, having wounded two employees, made their getaway in a Hudson, taking the 30,000 pesos --which were kept in the vaults-- with them ". Thus ran the headline in the late evening Santiago Las

Ultimas Noticias (The Latest News), which made no attempt to go into details.

The Police never really knew anything. They only had their suspicions.

Nobody really knew who the true perpetrators were, why the robbery had been carried out with such daring, nor what had become of the booty. That is, perhaps, why the Chilean press could find nothing better to do than nickname the gang the Apaches.

Felix López is already (1994) an old man of 90. He lives alone, as he always has done, in Sotomayor Street, Santiago, Chile. Arratia died in the 1940s. Recently, however, López has been willing to reveal what he saw and knew of Durruti's wandering outlaws, and of his own, while they were in the country. Though, of course -as a good, distrustful anarchist, despite the many years which have passed-- he refused to be photographed. He had been one of the leaders of the Chilean Anarchists, in the Construction Union, with a good deal of clout in the twenties and thirties.

Durruti and his boys never asked for any help from López and Arratia, in terms of manpower, in any of their bank raids. They only wanted the minimum, precise information needed to plan the robbery. The Chileans supplied them with information. According to López this was of a general and not very useful nature. It was more or less a case of "Hello, Goodbye".

López said: "Durruti was already well-known to us. Quite often we would publish things about the activities of our Spanish comrades, and, the best known practitioner of 'Anarchy by the Deed' was him. Durruti said to us: 'You are in need of economic funds. We are going to get them for you'. All five of them appeared to

be fine, well-dressed gentlemen". He went on to say that they wanted to pass unnoticed. In spite of the situation, Arratia and he couldn't help laughing because Durruti's accent was such an immediate give-away. "They asked us not to tell anyone about the meeting we had had. We asked no questions and they gave us no more explanations. Durruti laughingly said that if he told us anymore, we would probably go around with looks of astonishment on our faces. He told us to cheer up and to let him help us. And, sure enough, he got money".

"How much?" Felix López did not remember, but it was no small sum, he recalled. With the funds, they financed unions, set up a printing-press, organized meetings and put on plays for the workers.

The Big One

Durruti's Wanderers did all the work alone. And it was perfect.

The raids carried out by Durruti and his gang while in Chile were probably five in number. It is known that they worked in Santiago on the 18th and 19th of July. The Press, however, only entered into great details --and in for a great deal of speculation-- about the great Bank of Chile raid. This was the very first bank-raid ever to take place in the entire history of the country.

A police report, only made out months after the Wanderers had already left, only pointed out that some Spaniards (no other identity was established) had "worked in various professions until the day the robbery took place", and had taken up normal work once again until the early days of August. The landlady of the small hotel where they had stayed revealed much later that there had been five of them, "educated gentlemen", but

"gentlemen" who continually talked about social struggles and who called themselves revolutionaries, in search of funds destined to finance the overthrow of the Spanish Monarchy.

The raid took place at 1.15 p.m., Thursday, the 16th July, 1925. Las Ultimas Noticias editorialized that "the deed reminds one of the most sensationalist of American movies, or, rather, it was probably inspired by just such sensationalistic movie scenes".

The five masked Spaniards committed the hold-up. Levelling their pistols at the cashier and employees, they made off with more than 30,000 pesos, a more than very tidy sum for the times.

Three days later, with the Chilean Capital still in an uproar over what had happened, the first, semi-certitude emerged; the coup had been the work of outsiders. As a direct consequence of this, the police rounded up a great many of the then not too populous foreign community.

A reporter for another Santiagan newspaper mocked at what some people were saying about what he dubbed "this affair carried out by of a vulgar robber whose only near-victim had been a minor Railway clerk". Though the journalist had been dismissive, following López's account, the job had also been the handiwork of Durruti and the Wanderers. Similarly, a journal of the times made mention of the fact that the vaults of the Santiagan Aristocratic Horseman's Club had also been completely cleaned out, by authors of identity unknown.

Meanwhile, the police continued to round up suspects. One of those affected by the arrests was the Hudson's chauffeur who had been used in the robbery. He was a taxi-driver called Enrique Barcoj. The robbers had made

him stop his taxi and had forced him to drive them to the bank. Las Ultimas Noticias pointed out that, once the raid had been successfully concluded, the taxi wouldn't start up, so "the outlaws had to push it some distance" until the engine caught. The commentator added that, while the car was stalled, there had been an very clear "disinclination, on the part of the general public," to, in any way, prevent the get-away.

The Total Failure

Owing to these "doughty deeds", Barcoj was the first to be accused of involvement in the robbery, and he was forced to spend quite some time in the lock-up, despite the fact that, in truth, he had really had nothing to do with it. His story --that he had been forced into it by two Spaniards-- did not convince the authorities. He was only finally set free when the case was closed due to "the total failure of all their investigations", as the police themselves recognized.

By a curious twist of fate, it was that very August, 1925, that General Ibáñez del Campo, on general principles, had hundreds of workers' leaders, students and homosexuals transported to the distant Easter and Robinson Crusoe Islands. One of those to be transported was Felix López. He was being shipped out to the islands, shackled and chained, at exactly the same time as Durruti and his men were leaving Chile for good.

When the Press began to give voice to that popular version of the great robbery which saw the outlaws as "elegant and devil-may-care Spanish bandits", the Judge, His Honour Justice Fernando Soro Barriga, who initiated the criminal proceedings, became outraged. He sent an official letter to Parliament, complaining of "the

fantastic concoctions appearing in certain newspapers wherein these criminals are virtually deified".

Nor was Judge Soro Barriga so wide of the mark. In truth, the Press constantly played up the spectacular nature of the raid, comparing it favourably to --what one journalist referred to as-- "previous criminal activities of a very vulgar sort which have taken place in this country, activities only worthy of two-bit juvenile delinquents". Soro Barriga's strongly-worded reprimand had an immediate effect. The "bandits from Spain thesis" was obligatorily dropped. Newspapers were reprimanded by the authorities and warned "not to make up wild stories".

Durruti and his gang were left completely blameless, which did not particularly bother them, if it bothered them at all, for, by now, they were back in Europe. They arrived back after having roamed through Argentina and Montevideo, where, in fact, they really were in danger of being caught, while carrying out further "fund-raisings". The "clean" Chile visit had lasted about a month and had included two cities; Valparaíso (where they had arrived by ship from Cuba) and Santiago. This was without counting their passing-through the City of Los Andes. From there, they took the Trans-Andean train, as common, rustic passengers, arriving in the Argentinian City of Mendoza.

The Flashback

In December, 1924, with false passports, Buenaventura Durruti and Francisco (Paco) Ascaso left from Le Havre, aboard a Dutch freighter bound for the Antillas. Ricardo Sanz had arrived in Paris. He was the replacement, in the Solidarios (Solidarity) Group, for the recently

murdered Gregorio Suberbiela. He had come to inform those anarchists in exile of the desperate situation that the CNT was then in. Economic resources "must be found" in order to get it back on its feet once more. Thus was born the American peregrination. It was with Sanz himself that Durruti and Ascaso mapped out their itinerary. They would go on down to Cuba from there to act in Mexico and Argentina.

They arrived in Cuba. There, they found themselves with the Machado Dictatorship in full flower, and the workers' movement sadly withering. In Santa Clara, they worked the sugar plantations. While there, they organized a strike over wages. The overseers seized three striking peasants and whipped them mercilessly, by way of scaring the others, then sent them back to work in a wretched condition.

The following morning, the owner of the plantation was found dead in his bed. Upon his corpse, in brightly-coloured lettering, was pinned a note which read: "This is the Wanderers' Justice".

A hectic search was set a-foot amongst the cane-cutters to try to discover those responsible for the murder. The question asked of each and everyone was whether they knew who The Wanderers might be. Thus was the legend born.

From Havana, the group headed for Yucatán on the Mexican Coast. They were arrested by the Mexican Coast Guard as "smugglers". Still, from there, they managed to make their way to Mexico City. They were welcomed and taken in by Rafael Quintero, a worker who had fought with Zapata. At the end of March, 1925, they were joined by Gregorio Jover and Alejandro Ascaso, Paco's younger brother.

In the Mexico of the time --under General Plutarco Elías Calles' government-- they found internal petty struggles amongst the Anarchists, and little left of the Revolution. The few remaining vestiges that there were revealed a pretty depressing panorama. The Wanderers decided they would help the various Anarchist factions with money, and thereby help re-unite the Movement.

They set themselves up in a farm in Ticomán and, from there, planned their future "actions". In April, 1925, they robbed the Carolina Spinning Mill. They repeated similar operations in other factories and mills. With the "funds" raised, they built a "Rationalist School" --inspired by the teachings of Francisco Ferrer, the anarchist educational theorist, founder of the Escuela Moderna (the Modern School). Ferrer was sentenced to death by firing-squad in, in Barcelona, in 1909. They also financed the publication of a magazine and sent a very large sum of money to Sebastien Fauré, the French intellectual, so that he might set up a Social Science Library in France.

After Chile

In August, 1925, Durruti and his men arrived in Argentina from Chile. There, they decided to steer well clear of banks and other similar temptations. They began to work. Durruti became a stevedor, Francisco Ascaso, a cook, and Jover, a cabinet-maker. Alejandro Ascaso took ship back to Cuba. Despite the best of intentions, this new life-style lasted very little. There were soon two armed-robberies which --even if they did not commit them-- were immediately attributed to the gang. They were forced to go into hiding.

Their whereabouts only came to light again on the 18th of January, 1926. This was just after they raided the San Martín Bank of Argentina. This time there was no doubt that they were indeed the authors. The newspaper, La Prensa (The Press), wrote:

Seven individuals, four wearing masks, steeped down from a "Double Phaeton" at the corner of Buenos Aires and Belgrano Streets, just two blocks from a police station. Four of them entered the bank, while the other three, armed with rifles, stood guard, blocking the main entrance... Meanwhile, once inside, the four bandits moved fast. They leapt over the counters, emptied out all the cash registers, and gathered all the money they could find in a heap. They didn't even bother with the iron safe. They got away with 64, 085 pesos.

In Buenos Aires wanted-posters --photographs included-- were pinned up, and a reward offered for their capture. The Spanish Anarchists spent the first fortnight of February fleeing from house to house on the outskirts of the Federal Capital. These were the most nerve-racking times of the entire Latin American adventure. Still, they escaped safe if shaken. They managed to cross the Río Plata and get out of Argentina. They disembarked, eventually, in the Uruguayan Capital of Montevideo. From there, they made it back to Europe.

Buenaventura Durruti never accepted the titles of bandit or hold-up man. Such descriptions were very far from the nature of what his acts were all about. He maintained that, without his work "and that of a handful of dedicated anarchists, the workers would never have achieved the necessary strength and power which they in fact had at the very outbreak of the Civil War".

In 1933, he said: "It is indeed true that I have robbed banks. And not only in Spain, but in other countries too.

But it was always for the sake of the General Cause. All the money went straight into the coffers of the Organization (the CNT), since that was the its predestined destination. Nobody kept back a single cent and, if this method was the only effective one at the time, that is because the circumstances were radically different from those of today. Now we say 'Down with Banditry! Up with Collective Appropriation!'

Some three years later, Durruti was struck down by a bullet in the University City of Madrid. He was not robbing any bank: He was defending the Capital from the Fascist Beast.